



Palaung Women's Organization

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Voices for Change:

Domestic Violence and Gender Discrimination in the Palaung area

Executive Summary

This report documents how women in the Palaung area are affected by domestic violence and gender discrimination. Survey results collected by PWO show that almost all respondents had experienced or seen physical violence within families in their community, and that physical violence is occurring with alarming frequency, in many cases on an almost daily basis. PWO's research shows that gender discrimination is widespread in the Palaung area, and that many people's attitudes conform to traditional gender stereotypes which assume that women must fulfil the role of homemaker and accept sole responsibility for childcare duties.

Since the 2010 election, Burma's military-backed regime has failed to take any effective action to promote women's rights and gender equality, or to uphold its commitments to CEDAW. Burma remains one of only two ASEAN countries lacking a specific law criminalising domestic violence, and PWO's research has found that there are no government-led projects to raise awareness of domestic violence and women's rights in the rural areas of northern Shan State, where the vast majority of the Palaung population live.

The 'new' regime has yet to address the economic and social crises fuelling domestic violence in the Palaung area. The economic crisis afflicting the Palaung people as a direct result of the state's monopoly of the tea industry, as well as the increase in opium cultivation and addiction in the Palaung area since the 2010 election have directly contributed to the problem of domestic violence, as males resort to physical violence as a means of expressing their anger and frustration with their situation.

More than five decades of civil war have bred a culture of male domination, fear, and violence in Burma. Palaung people, especially males, have been socialised into this culture, and see violence as a necessary means of asserting their authority over their wives, in the same way as the state uses violence to assert its authority over Burma's ethnic nationalities. The regime appears to have no intention of bringing an end to Burma's culture of violence, and continues to wage war against ethnic rebels in northern Shan State.

Domestic violence has a devastating impact on individuals, families and communities. Apart from the obvious physical impact of domestic violence, women also suffer psychologically. Domestic violence threatens the stability of the family unit, often has a negative impact on children's education, and acts as an obstacle to community development.

Burma's military-backed regime needs to recognise domestic violence and gender discrimination as obstacles to achieving a peaceful society in Burma, and to embark upon a program of genuine political reform which addresses the social and economic factors fuelling domestic violence and gender discrimination.

PWO therefore makes the following recommendations:

To the military-backed government:

- To end military conflict and human rights violations, especially in ethnic areas, in order to bring an end to the national culture of violence in Burma.
- To acknowledge the prevalence of domestic violence and gender discrimination in Burma and to respect and protect women's human rights by fulfilling their obligations to CEDAW and international law
- To review domestic law, ensuring that it meets international standards for the protection of women's rights, especially in the area of violence against women
- To allow local and international NGOs and CBOs to work freely and securely to address the problems of gender discrimination and gender-based violence, including domestic violence.

To the international community and INGOs:

- To put pressure on the military-backed government to work towards ending gender discrimination and violence against women in Burma
- To work together with and support CBOs to promote gender equality and women's rights through education and providing assistance to rural women

To the local community:

- To help to solve the problem of domestic violence and gender discrimination by speaking out about cases of human rights abuse and violence in the community.
- To recognise that the solution of the problems of domestic violence and gender discrimination is a step towards achieving a peaceful society

Background of Palaung Women's Organization

The Palaung Women's Organization (PWO) was established in 2000 to support the Palaung people of Burma. PWO provides gender and human rights training to Palaung women and their communities, increases international and community knowledge of the Palaung culture and history, and raises awareness of the human rights abuses suffered by Palaung people.

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